BEYOND ENTHEOGENS:
AN INTERVIEW WITH MARTIN BALL, Ph.D.
ON THE "ENTHEOGENIC EVOLUTION"

by Allowah - Submitted to NeuroSoup.com on April 12, 2009

[Note: Prior to reading this, it's recommended that you listen to Martin Ball's podcast segment entitled "Light as a Feather" @ http://www.entheogenic.podomatic.com/. For those who don't have the time, I provide a brief synopsis below. Also note that although the terms "psychedelics" and "entheogens" are used interchangeably in what follows, they have two distinct meanings. This will be discussed below.]

A few months ago I submitted an essay to Reality Sandwich [and the NeuroSoup Members Only Area] entitled "Psychedelics in Light of the Yoga Sutras," which was the rough draft of a chapter for a forthcoming book entitled (tentatively), "Yoga & Psychedelics." In the piece, I raised questions like: Is it possible to acquire *siddhis* (yogic/psychic powers) via use of psychedelics? Can/do psychedelics produce real and lasting change in the user? Are the mystical experiences experienced with psychedelics the same as those that are experienced in the state of Samadhi? The essay didn't arrive at any strong conclusions, but it did seem to spark interest in a lot of RS readers.

Not long after submitting the piece, I received an Amazon gift card for my birthday and decided to add to my steadily growing library of psychedelia. One book that I ordered was "Mushroom Wisdom: How Shamans Cultivate Spiritual Consciousness," by Martin W. Ball, Ph.D. When it arrived in the mail, I was impressed with it enough to decide to contact Martin and request to ask him some questions. Somewhat to my surprise, Martin seemed happy to oblige, and the answers I promptly received from him were very full and carefully thought out. After getting such quick responses to my first two questions, I figured that we would just go on corresponding like this indefinitely. So I sent a third question...but received nothing from Martin for a solid week. I wondered what was happening.

In fact, what was happening was that Martin had been experiencing a breakthrough on his journey with entheogens, something I was not aware of because I had not been listening to Martin's most recent "Entheogenic Evolution" podcasts (see link above). When I did finally tune in and listen, I was rather amazed to discover the following:

One day in late February, Martin was smoking salvia divinorum, but much to his surprise, it felt just like 5-MeO-DMT (Martin has described 5-MeO-DMT as an immediate launch into the heart of God, which is experientially very different than most salvia experiences). A little shaken by the experience, he went to take a shower after it was all over, came back later, and in the process of putting his ceremonial instruments away, found that a feather he had been using started to seem to move about in his hand, as though it were being moved by energy currents. Martin immediately recognized that it was the same energy that he feels during his other

entheogenic experiences where his arms would move in symmetrical patterns. However, salvia being short acting, he was no longer under the influence of the plant and in a "normal" state of consciousness. Somehow, the energy that he had previously only been able to consistently perceive and feel while in an entheogenic state was suddenly immediately present and accessible. He began to experiment with the feather, and realized that the feather was teaching him how to work with energy, and he also found that the feather could answer "yes" or "no" to questions put to it. After exploring that for a few days, Martin realized that he could do energetic re-balancings with people, with very positive results. Apparently some of the people he worked with had entheogenic-type experiences themselves simply from the feathering without ingesting any substance.

Martin also realized that he could now enter into an entheogenic state (particularly the 5-MeO-DMT state) without actually taking an entheogen. In other words, he no longer needs the "medicines." What was more, he quickly found that his ability to enter into deep energetic states was rapidly producing a cascade of conclusions about the fundamental nature of reality. In a short period of time, Martin found himself in the curious position of being able to explain the nature of reality from an entheogenic (God within) perspective. In sum, he suddenly found that he had consistent and comprehensive answers to some of the most fundamental questions of existence. Answers to these questions (such as the nature of God, questions about life after death, alternate realities, the nature of consciousness, etc.) became immediately obvious and clear. To great surprise, the answers to these questions were at odds with virtually every religion or metaphysical system previously formulated. Energized by the startling revelations, Martin decided to share these conclusions with his podcast-listening audience. In doing so, he has been uncompromising in sharing his conclusions on the nature of reality, something that has ruffled quite a few feathers.

As I said, I found this all pretty fascinating, though not quite sure what to make of it. It was 2 am and I went to bed because I had to get up early the next morning to teach a yoga class on the beach. When I got up I was still processing Martin's podcast. The yoga class was fairly uneventful, but for one little thing... When I went to collect my belongings at the end of our session, there was a feather stuck between two strings of my guitar, almost as if someone had stuck it there for me. I looked around and asked all of the students if anyone had given me a feather (why they would, I have no idea), but everyone said they hadn't. Strange. Here it was just 9 hours or so later after listening to Martin talking about his magic feather, and the universe is giving me a feather. I took it as a sign of some sort...

Later that day, I emailed Martin and told him the story about finding the feather, adding that I sensed a connection to him, noting that we had met in cyberspace right around the time of his breakthrough, maybe just a week or so before. Sensing that all the synchronicities were nudging me in the direction of continuing our relationship, I

asked Martin if I could write about what was happening with him. A few days later, Martin emailed back saying that it would actually be most ideal if I would come meet with him first, but if not, I could do an email interview with him, especially because so many people had been writing him with questions. So that's what we did, and below is the essentially unedited text of that email correspondence.

Before reading it, though, I want to just mention again that Martin has received a good deal of flak for his most recent podcasts in which he has begun to freely dispense his views on God and the nature of reality (what Martin humorously has referred to as his "ontological onslaught"). I myself was somewhat taken aback by some of Martin's monologue, such as his saying that he didn't need to be open-minded (as one podcast commentator suggested he be), but I figured that after all, it is Martin's podcast and he should be allowed to freely express his views. And considering that Martin has spent much of his life engaging with existential issues, that he does have a Ph.D., and that he's certainly explored entheogens far more than I have at this point, it might be worth my while to listen and deeply consider his perspective. Perhaps you will feel the same. So with that, I will leave you to the interview, hope it helps...

BACKGROUND

~ Would you relate for the readers how you got onto the path of entheogens, and what were some of your earliest experiences with the medicines? Did you decide right away that you were going to devote your life to this, or did it happen over time?

My first experience with entheogens was with psilocybin mushrooms. It was the summer after my first year of college and I went to the “Gathering of the Vibes” festival in Northern California with some friends at the beginning of the summer. While we were in our vehicle in line to get into the festival area, a fellow walked by saying “shrooms . . . shrooms” and our driver bought some. I had never tried mushrooms before and didn’t know what to expect or how much to take or anything. That night we split up the bag and headed out to enjoy the show. I got separated from my friends and as the mushrooms came on, I quickly realized that I had no idea who I was. It was very disconcerting and I felt lost and afraid. I finally found my friends and relaxed, but overall, I wasn’t impressed. I felt, “well, that was strange. I don’t know if I need to do that again.”

I tried mushrooms a few more times, but quickly started to develop what might be called “flashbacks,” though I don’t think that was accurate. I found that I could spontaneously slip into mushroom-like states of consciousness just by looking at trees or blades of grass or any other sufficiently complex patterning. It really worried me as I felt out of control, so I stayed away from mushrooms for a couple years after that.

I eventually went back to mushrooms after I got involved in “shamanic

drumming," where you play a drum rapidly and go on "journeys" with your eyes closed in the dark. I was never too impressed with that methodology – it always felt somewhat contrived to me – but on my last "journey," I found myself watching a golden eagle fly down to the ground in front of me. Where it landed, a collection of mushrooms sprang up and it bent down and ate them all. The eagle then transformed into a rainbow light version of myself and said, "If you want to visit with the eagle, eat the mushrooms." So that was the last time I did that kind of "shamanic drumming" work and the very next time I ate mushrooms, I had a life-changing initiation into the world of the mushrooms. What I learned from that one journey became the basis for my book, *Mushroom Wisdom*.

What you wrote about that experience is on pp. 113 - 115 of Mushroom Wisdom, is that correct? When I read that the first time, I noted how similar your initiation experience with mushrooms was to my own initial experience using the ayahuasca analogue "Jurema" (Mimosa Hostilis and Syrian Rue). As with yours, it felt like an initiation, there was a life review, it was extremely beautiful and profound, and it was life-changing. After that experience I decided that I was going to devote my life to better understand these plant teachers.

I guess one basic question I would ask you based upon what you wrote is: What do you think it was that changed in your life that led you to have such a profound experience later when in those earlier encounters you did not receive "initiation" from the mushrooms? Was it just that you weren't ready for it when you were younger? Was it a different strain of psilocybin? A bigger dose? Set and setting? All of the above? You basically answer this in Mushroom Wisdom, but since now you're in a different space, perhaps you will have a new perspective...

When I first tried mushrooms I had very little idea of what was meant by the phrase "spiritual experience," so really I was just getting started opening up that area of my life. In retrospect, I can see that the mushrooms basically opened me up right away, which is why I started having spontaneous experiences early on. It was a bit much for me, however, so I struggled with it and had to learn how to better control myself and deal with the fear of losing control. Zen meditation helped a lot with that. When I later went back to mushrooms, I had done a great deal more reading about psychedelics and what an "entheogenic" experience is about.

I'd also want to express that "big experiences" are important because they can really shift our perspective on reality, but I'm not a big proponent of the idea that we can suddenly become awakened and then that's it. Many spiritual traditions treat the "enlightenment" moment as some final end point or liberation or whatever. I've progressed through so many different levels of mystical and awakening experiences that it has to be understood as an ongoing process and not a final achievement.

Another question: From what you wrote, you seemed already to have some ability to have entheogenic experiences without even using them. Did that ability return a few years later when you started to use mushrooms again? Did you still feel "out of control" and concerned about that?

The spontaneous experiences did return, but I had relaxed a great deal so they never really went into "full-blown" mode as that was largely a result of panic and anxiety about the experience. For example, at early stages of a mushroom experience I often see M.C. Escher-like interlocking geometry like little lizards. It's fairly easy for me to see stuff like that and I just don't pay it much attention.

~ Would you also speak about your background and how you got into the study of religion. What were some of your most formative experiences, ones that shaped your consciousness from early on?

I was always curious about religion ever since I was a kid. More broadly speaking, I'd say I was interested in the true nature of reality, and religion and belief in God really puzzled me. My dad is a chemist and scientific materialist through and through. My mom was pretty hard-core anti-religion, which she picked up from my grandfather, who was a strong supporter of Native American cultures and traditions, but was adamantly against anything that struck him as "organized" religion. (My grandfather, though not Native, had been initiated into the Ojibway Grand Medicine Society, was an initiated Navajo Blessingway singer, and had gone on vision quest with the Lakota – and he spoke all three languages fluently, having lived with each culture for a period of time.)

I grew up without any religion, as a result. Occasionally as child I would pray to God to give me something tangible that I could understand as I knew I would never be satisfied with faith or "belief." That simply wasn't good enough for me – I was too much of a skeptic and rationalist for that.

But I basically identified myself as an atheist and enjoyed talking about science, philosophy, and evolution with my religious friends, who didn't always appreciate my perspective. Eventually, after graduating from high school, I discovered Zen Buddhism and that seemed refreshingly rational and free from mythological or superstitious thinking, so I started practicing. When I got to college, I chose philosophy as my major and Religious Studies as my minor. When my philosophy professors told me that only Western cultures had philosophy and every other culture just had "religion" I knew that I wasn't going to get what I wanted from philosophy, so I decided to go onto grad school and get my advanced degrees in Religious Studies. My intention had been to study Buddhist philosophy, but ended up focusing on Native American traditions, shamanism, and comparative mysticism and the study of consciousness.

Who or what influenced inspired you to switch to those?

Luck of the draw, really. In my first term in grad school in my comparative mysticism class the student to my right got to pick the Buddhist philosopher from the list to present on and I didn't want to choose from the other options and suggested I present on a Native American mystic. The professor told me to go talk to the professor who did Native American religions and I just got more involved in that area as time went on. Eventually, when I was taking my second year of Sanskrit for my Buddhist studies and teaching myself Navajo for my Native American studies, I decided that was just too much disparate language work and dropped the Sanskrit and focused on Navajo and Apache for my dissertation field work with the Mescalero Apaches in New Mexico.

What I find interesting is that we seem to have had somewhat similar experiences: I had no real religious faith as a young person but from early on had many questions. I started off studying Philosophy, but ultimately realized that there aren't any real satisfying answers in the Western academic study of Philosophy, and later switched to Religious Studies. Then, for me, that wasn't enough, but a deep encounter with India and Yoga answered a lot of my questions. That, too, wasn't enough, and recently I found my way to the plant teachers for further guidance. When I did, an "initiation" experience inspired me to devote my life to exploring these things.

ENTHEOGENS

~ **You've talked about this in your podcasts, but perhaps you would elaborate: What is the purpose of the entheogens? Why would you recommend that we use them? Why do you say that they are the best teachers, better than any human teacher or guru? Do you have any human teachers from whom you still gain insight or inspiration?**

To put it as simply as I can, my understanding is that entheogens and visionary medicines affect us the way they do because that is how God, the Divine Being, intended it. They are our direct line of access to interfacing with the Divine Being without any intermediaries. This is incredibly significant as, in my understanding, basically all our spiritual systems are defective or illusory in one way or another. Most people have a hard time with my saying that, but it is not difficult to see how priests, gurus, and other spiritual leaders can lead people astray with their basically fantasy-based systems of spiritual growth and purification, once you understand what the problem is and how ego has infected all of our religious and spiritual systems. It's complicated to explain this in brief as really each religious or spiritual system needs to be addressed individually. There are some jewels hidden away in the rubble, but for the most part, I've concluded that most religious systems are more illusory than not. The best way to avoid this problem is to go directly to the source for yourself, and that is

what the medicines do. We all come into this world with the capacity to interface with the Divine directly without anyone else telling us what to do or think or believe. My suggestion is that we take advantage of that fact and explore our divine natures for ourselves.

Personally, I've never worked with a spiritual mentor or guru. I've been initiated by several Mescalero Apache medicine people, but even there, their primary teaching to me was, "This is how we do it, but you'll have to find your own way. That's the way medicine works. Discover it for yourself." I've really taken that to heart and would have to agree with it. For me, the clearest way for us to discover ourselves is to work with the medicines. That's what they do. That's why they work the way they do. They're gifts and we should use them.

So here's a question I've been meaning to ask you for awhile, and forgive my playing devil's advocate here: Isn't it a bit of an assumption to say that these substances are from God and reveal our Divine nature to us? I'm sure there are plenty of people out there who look on these things (drugs, they call them) as leading people astray, away from God and into narcissism. Even to use the term "entheogen" is misleading, they say, because whether these things truly reveal God to us is an open question. Others have said that at best these things give us deep insight into the Psyche, but not into the true nature of the Divine...

I'd say that people who think that way are making judgments not only of others, but also of God's work through evolution. In my view, the Divine Being lives through nature and through us as living beings. The fact that we have DMT in our brains, lungs, spinal fluid, blood, and on our nerve endings isn't an accident. The fact that substances like DMT are readily available in nature is also not an accident. DMT is one of the primary means that the Divine uses to communicate with us. It is the very medium through which divine energy expresses itself through us. If people genuinely believe in God or a Divine Being and also believe that the physical world we live in was in some sense created or evolved by this being, then how can they rationally say that something like DMT is a drug and is bad for us in some way when we are living, breathing, walking and talking DMT beings?

I also find the narcissism argument rather odd as well. While of course people can get carried away by how they choose to interpret their visionary experiences (which is why I always advise people to consider their experiences as lessons and not as literally true - it is very easy for egos to grasp onto fantasy and stories), I don't think that entheogens can be criticized for leading to narcissism any more than any other spiritual or religious practice. Most religions have a sense of collective narcissism on a widespread scale and have really confused ideas about the nature of the divine or the

nature of reality. People cling to these ideas and create all kinds of fantasy worlds for themselves and in the process, often become judgmental of people who don't buy into their fantasy. That, to me, is collective narcissism. There are so many "one true paths" out there that it's absurd.

The flip side of the "one true path" narcissism is the wildly wishy-washy "it's all true" version of "spirituality" that promotes sloppy thinking, lack of discernment, and a feel-good vibe that we're just going to accept anything that people say simply because they say it's "spiritual." We tend to value this these days and call it having an "open mind" or being "tolerant" or even "enlightened." In my view, people get sucked into a great deal of fantasy and down right silly thought here too. It's narcissistic in the sense that people use this mode of thought to consider themselves as "spiritually awakened" or "ascended," but that's just another ego trap.

The reason why entheogens are so effective is because they force you to face yourself. For the discerning traveler, these can be very illuminating experiences and the potential for growth and self-discovery is greater than through any other methodology. But if they let their egos get attached to their visions or their personal interpretations of their visions, then they can become just as lost as anyone else. That's why in traditional societies that use entheogens, the medicines are integrated into culture and into the community so people can work through these experiences together and collectively.

In the end, I think the strongest argument for entheogen use is that they open us up to direct energetic experiences. Energy is real. Visions aren't. Visions are great and they can give us many insights, but the real work is working with the energy. I rely on energy, and energy cannot lie. It's actually impossible, if you think about it.

I say all this with having experienced myself as God during my ayahuasca session (or God-like), but perhaps feeling like one is "God" or the "Messiah" is the height of narcissism (and something which Pinchbeck, Mckenna, and others struggled with?) Surely if God does have a sense of humor (another assumption?), these things could also be part of the Cosmic Game?

I know it's hard for egos to process, but let's get clear on this: If God really is inside us, which is definitely my experience, then yes, we all are God. This is a basic fact of reality. Now, that doesn't mean that our egos are God. That's where we can get really confused. If someone says, "I am God and you all need to worship me and follow me" or whatever, then we have a problem. It's very different from saying, "Yes, I've discovered that I'm God, and so are you, and so are you, and so are you, etc." One statement is coming from a place of ego and the other is coming from a simple recognition of the nature of reality. There's a huge difference.

It's also important to emphasize that just because someone feels that they've come up with a unique perspective on the nature of reality, it doesn't necessarily make them narcissistic. McKenna was really taken with the idea of the timewave and 2012. Personally, in my reading of him, he's a bit too attached to the content of his visions -

aliens and UFOs and all - but he may also be right about the basic fractal nature of spacetime. And he took himself with a grain of salt. As he wrote, he's either crazy or he's an unsung Newton. I'm not sure if there's any real practical applicability of the timewave theory or any way to test it, so it might be irrelevant. But if there is something there, McKenna could be a revolutionary thinker. This doesn't make him necessarily narcissistic. It just makes him original.

Pinchbeck is a bit more challenging as he seems to say that he is Quetzalcoatl, but he also hedges this statement with the claim that Quetzalcoatl is ultimately an "archetypal god-form," so in that sense, it's not really him - he's just the messenger, in a sense. I'm not too into metaphysics, so I'm not sure what an archetypal god-form really is in Pinchbeck's version of reality. My question for that kind of thinking is "where does this god-form exist?" "What do you mean by the term 'archetype'?" So, I'm not really concerned about his theoretical narcissism as I am with what seems to be rather loose New Age "anything is possible" metaphysics, which often just leads to an intellectual mess. In my view, reality is real and not everything and anything is true just because it speaks to our spiritual crisis. As Pinchbeck has Quetzalcoatl saying, we have to use our power of discernment. However, I don't necessarily see this in Pinchbeck's writing.

I try and sort out some of these questions in a chapter in my book, The Entheogenic Evolution, where I write about McKenna, Pinchbeck, Quetzalcoatl and Santo Daime.

~ You gave the impression in your podcast that you no longer feel it necessary to take entheogens, but that you will do so if you feel called to do so (or directed by the feather). Is that correct? Are you still having 5-MeO-DMT experiences without actually taking it?

It's funny, but my ego is actually a little disappointed in this. I really enjoy working with the medicines and find them infinitely fascinating. But no, I no longer need them. For lack of a better word, I've made a transition and I no longer need the medicines. Given that the medicines are there to help us discover ourselves, once we make that discovery, the mirror is wiped clean, so to speak. In this transition what has occurred is that my ego or normal sense of self hasn't evaporated or anything, but it has loosened up. I can now freely slip into profoundly psychedelic states of consciousness without ingesting any medicine at all. The most powerful of these experiences are immediately comparable to my experiences with 5-MeO-DMT, which is by far the most profound of all the medicines that I've had the honor of working with. At the beginning of this transition, I was a bit concerned that "Martin" was going to evaporate and I was going to walk around with this strange voice all the time and move more like an energy being than a normal person, but I've found that I only go into deep states when it is necessary and most of the time I can just be "normal," so to speak, and don't have to worry about it.

I should perhaps clarify a little bit of what I'm talking about here. For the past year and a half I had been going through a very intense personal exploration into my relationship with the divine, working regularly with ayahuasca at the local Santo Daime

church and also working with 5-MeO-DMT at a local entheogenic temple along with occasional sessions with mushrooms and salvia divinorum. This was quite a challenging process for me and I write about it in my book, *The Entheogenic Evolution*. Basically, I underwent a profound process of energetic opening and clearing in the quest to discover myself and my relationship to the Divine, or God. The end result is that I am extraordinary clear on what that relationship is and the medicines have done their work. For example, after having made this transition to not needing the medicines, I took a large dose of 5-MeO-DMT, and though this is a metaphor, in the experience all I saw was "myself" in the "mirror." I've processed through what I needed to process through in order to understand myself, the nature of reality, and the nature of the Divine Being. Now that I've reached that point, there really isn't a reason for me to take the medicines.

An exception to that might be in working with others, but even there, it isn't necessary. I can feel and work with the same energy in a non-altered state that I used to need the medicines to perceive and work with. I'm also happy to work with others in their use of entheogens. For example, recently I've been doing energy work for people while they are using salvia divinorum. It's quite amazing. Even though I'm not using the medicine, I can easily tell what they are experiencing at an energetic level and can even communicate with them without having to speak out loud. It's the kind of thing I never would have believed if I weren't doing it myself and getting confirmation from others in the room that I wasn't speaking out loud but the person I was "speaking" to can repeat back to me what I "said" to them. It's hard to believe.

AL: That is amazing. Do you think you would be able to develop a program whereby you could effectively teach how to use entheogens as you have so that ultimately the student would graduate beyond entheogens? In other words, do you feel you could teach this to people? Or do you feel that maybe you are unique in that you've been doing this for so long, have a special constitution, etc.? Perhaps the Divine has chosen you to show what is possible? What do you think/feel?

MB: It's an interesting question and something I'm just starting to work on. In many ways, when people come to me for feather work, they go into entheogenic experiences without any medicine. I was working on a woman the other day who compared her experience to 5-MeO-DMT. However, that's just in that context and not really a way of teaching people how to access it on their own.

In the end, it comes down to each person and where they are at in their work with the medicines or their spiritual work and practice. I've had to go through a tremendous amount of energetic processing with the medicines to reach the point where I am now. I spent over a year vibrating like mad as my energy channels were opening up and clearing out. But this kind of gets back to the "why me" question [see below]. Why did the medicines work on me this way when they don't necessarily do the same for others?

I've never seen anyone go through vibrations the way I have. For whatever reason, this is just what I've gotten from the medicines. It doesn't mean anything about me - this is just what I received - this is how they worked on me. That isn't really something I can teach to someone else. The best I might be able to hope for is, through my feather work, giving people a sense of what the energy feels like and how it works, and then hopefully they can discover it and work with it on their own.

AL: You talked in a recent podcast about how entheogens make many people uncomfortable, and you asserted that how comfortable we are with the entheogenic experience is really a reflection of how comfortable with our Divine nature, as opposed to our egoic personality. Would you say that you have always been comfortable with your entheogenic experiences, or have you become more comfortable over time?

MB: This one is really tricky. First, I'd want to distinguish between being comfortable and being entertained. People who use entheogens for recreation might be "comfortable" with their experience, but also might not be getting too much out of it. I do think that once you get past a certain threshold, the idea of taking entheogens "recreationally" is a bit obsolete and meaningless – it's difficult to imagine a full-blown ayahuasca experience as being entertaining or fun for someone. But with that said, yes, I basically agree with what you say above. If entheogens make you uncomfortable then you are ultimately uncomfortable with yourself and who you really are, but that is what entheogens do – they show you who you are.

Let me give you an example. A friend of mine finds salvia divinorum very disconcerting, as do many people. Based on my current understanding, salvia works primarily on the energetic center that is located at your throat and governs personal expression. When I did a diagnostic for this friend, the information was that he should work with salvia. He didn't like this answer as he was much more comfortable with other medicines that didn't challenge him as much. However, he needs work with his personal expression. He likes to quote a great deal – to the extent that he never really says what he thinks or what he feels – he just quotes a song or text that approximates what he wants to say. The result is that he isn't comfortable with expressing his true thoughts and feelings, for whatever reason. Working with salvia will help him confront this limit that his ego has placed on him and will open him up to more efficient energy flow from the Divine through his being. It is by facing those challenges that make us uncomfortable that we can grow the most.

Once you've worked through these blocks and find that all the medicines make you comfortable, then you've accomplished a great deal of what you personally need to work on and work through. At that point, you can either decide to give the medicines a rest or devote yourself to deeper issues and open yourself to new challenges.

AL: Prior to your recent experience with the feather, did you have any sense that

there would come a time in your personal evolution when you would no longer need entheogens? Otherwise put: Did you see this coming?

MB: The answer would have to be yes only because a little more than a year ago when I really started on this path in earnest the voice of the Divine spoke through me and said, "Use the medicines for now, but there will come a time when you will no longer need them." I didn't expect this transition to happen in a little over a year, but apparently it has. When I made the transition into my new state, the voice again spoke through me as I was undergoing a spontaneous, endogenous 5-MeO-DMT release, and said, "You no longer need the medicines, but use them to explore my infinite mind and body." So, I have "permission" to continue to use them, so to speak, but they are no longer necessary for me on my spiritual path.

I will say, however, that personally, no, I never expected any of this. Honestly, to have this Divine voice speak through me and tell me things seems pretty crazy and that's really challenging for people to accept – myself included. But, it was the truth, so there you go. I didn't imagine that it would actually happen, but now that it has, I have to take the original communication at face value.

AL: Who has had the most influence upon you in regard to entheogens?

MB: Honestly, no one. I've been interested in entheogens because I have personally desired to understand myself and the nature of reality. That has been my one driving force behind my use of entheogens. I've certainly enjoyed the works of people like McKenna and Pinchbeck and others and they've inspired me, but my quest has been my own. Recently I think that some of the best work out there on entheogens is Benny Shanon's book, *Antipodes of the Mind*. I really appreciate his thorough approach to the phenomenology of ayahuasca and like his characterization of the "mirror of the soul," though for the record, I don't see any need to posit the existence of any kind of entity like a soul. They simply aren't necessary for the system to work and therefore I don't see why God would create them. My point, however, is that Shanon stays away from reifying entheogenic experience, unlike many other writers. I thoroughly agree with Shanon that entheogens do not take you to other levels of reality or encounters with other beings. It's all just your personal interface with God. Nothing more, and nothing less. Occam's razor is a good maxim to follow: Don't posit unnecessary entities. If we can explain all this by simply saying that entheogenic experiences are personal interfaces with the Divine, then we don't need to spin fantasies of heavens or hells or angels or astral beings. It's all just God. The simplest explanation is usually the correct one.

AL: At the outset of ***Mushroom Wisdom*****, you touched on the idea that entheogens are a "great equalizer," leveling the spiritual playing field, so to speak. I'm wondering**

if you would expand on that a bit, and maybe connect it to the debate about whether/why the "Guru" is dead for us these days, and whether the entheogens can/must? perform the same essential role, as well as the issue of whether we need to use these things under the guidance of a experienced shaman/guru?

MB: Entheogens are a great spiritual equalizer because they make profoundly spiritual states of consciousness available to anyone willing to learn to work with them. While this is true of other spiritual modalities such as meditation, yoga, prayer, fasting, drumming, etc., entheogens stand out for their effectiveness in engendering such states when used in a responsible manner. For most people, I speculate that it would be more likely for them to have deep and profoundly transformative experiences with entheogens than through virtually any other means. However, I also feel that entheogen use is most productive and beneficial when paired with other forms of spiritual practice, especially meditation and energy work (such as through martial arts, yoga, dance, body work, etc.).

Entheogenic spirituality is not easy, so it is important to understand that to advocate entheogens as a tool for spiritual development is not to advocate what could be described as an "easy" path. There is some judgment that because entheogens make spiritual experiences so readily accessible, it is taking an "easy" path, as opposed to years of dedicated meditation and prayer to reach such profound levels of consciousness. While entheogens do make deeply profound states more accessible, there is nothing "easy" about working with these profound plant teachers. Entheogens can be more demanding than any spiritual teacher or system of practice and they require deep dedication to working with them for personal spiritual development and growth. But with that said, it is also true that they do make profound experiences more accessible to more people than any other means of cultivating spiritual consciousness.

It is highly significant that the entheogens themselves are the teachers in the context of entheogenic spirituality. In traditional societies, shamans create the context for new initiates to encounter the sacred medicines, but shamans tend not to be "gurus." The role of the guru is to personally guide the spiritual seeker along the path to enlightenment and is the ultimate judge of the seeker's progress. With entheogenic spirituality, the shamans are the technicians of the sacred and hold the knowledge of how to use the medicines as tools. Their role is to teach the initiate how to use the medicines and access their wisdom, but the source of the real teachings is the medicines themselves.

Entheogenic spirituality therefore places a great deal of responsibility on the individual. It is in largely private, subjective experience (even if done in a group setting) that the individual encounters the power of the medicines. The lessons that unfold are unique for each person and no two sessions with a visionary medicine are the same, even if there are similar characteristics. When done with the proper intent, preparation, and dedication, lessons build on each other over time and the initiate can progress through infinite levels of spiritual awakening and evolution.

An encounter with a visionary medicine is always an encounter with the self - with

all levels of the self from the ego to the "higher self" to one's divine nature as an embodiment of Source. Because of this, the medicines always "know" exactly who you are, where you are at, and what lessons you need to continue on your path of spiritual development. The truth is right there, but the choice is always yours. How will you respond to the lesson? What will you choose?

One needs neither a shaman nor a guru to have such lessons through entheogen use. Yet having a trusted guide or teacher can be very important for helping the spiritual seeker through difficult passages in the entheogenic journey. Our modern Western society is lacking in models who are experienced with entheogenic spirituality; shamans, gurus, or otherwise. Most "mainstream" spiritual practitioners have little to no knowledge of entheogens or their potential, and even the most "enlightened" spiritual leaders can be highly judgmental of entheogenic spirituality.

Therefore, finding a good guide can be exceedingly difficult. Much Western use of entheogens is overtly "recreational" and while spontaneous spiritual experiences can develop in such contexts, their regularity and depth can be greatly increased and enhanced by guided ceremonial use. It is for this reason that many Westerners are drawn to work with indigenous healers and shamans or participate in religious use of entheogens such as through the Native American Church, the Uniao do Vegetal, or Santo Daime.

As entheogenic spirituality becomes more popular, the need for experienced teachers and models will grow. Ideally, centers could be opened where those who choose could be initiated into the Mysteries. Initiates could be taught how to dedicate themselves to the experience, how to center their thoughts and focus their minds and how to let go of fear and judgment as they turn within and let the experience unfold. With the right contexts, deeply transformative spiritual experiences could be made available to more and more people, giving them a direct experience of divine realities and transcendent states of consciousness. Even if only encountered once, an entheogenic experience can be life-transforming. And for those who are called to do the rigorous work of evolving themselves at the guidance of the plant teachers, they could be given a context in which to do their practice in a safe and supportive way.

AL: **A few questions about this, also touching on the issue of whether using entheogens is "cheating" or "the easy way."**

Of course, they're not easy at all. It can be quite a rigorous and terrifying path, as we know -- Awe-inspiring in the face of the Mysterium Tremendum. Ego-death...never a fun thing. On the other hand, having been connected with the Yoga of asceticism (tapasya), I also know that it is also not an easy path, and perhaps it is more gradual, slower, but also ultimately more lasting?

I'm thinking of one of my teachers in particular who did years of intense tapas in India (including 40 day fasts, chanting in icy rivers and lakes, 3 years chanting into the fire) and can now seemingly enter into samadhi at will. I haven't seen or talked to him

for years and would love to ask him about all of this, but I sense (as you noted) that he would be very much offended by my even broaching the subject. My sense is that he would be one of those teachers who would say, "How can you compare my hard-earned Samadhi with your little drug trip?" And the answer is: I really can't because I've never experienced Samadhi except via plant medicine.

I'm sure you're aware of what Eckhart Tolle said to Oprah regarding his having tried LSD and feeling that his awakening experience was, for him, "much better." Of course, maybe if he had tried an actual Plant Medicine instead, like Peyote, his experience might have been different. Perhaps it's a sign that the world still isn't quite ready for direct transmissions via plant wisdom. Perhaps people like Eckhart Tolle are preparing the way for that to happen en masse.

My personal experience was that ayahuasca gave me the initiation that I never received from my gurus. With only one teacher did I even have any kind of mystical experience, and that I believe was due to a Kundalini Shaktipat initiation I received. Very blissful, yes, but lightweight compared to the plant teachers. Still, my question to you is whether the "slow and steady path," like in the Tortoise and Hare story, might be the ultimately the choicest (long lasting) in the long run?

MB: Because entheogens can produce radical states of spiritual consciousness rather reliably and consistently, they can be seen as an accelerated path of spiritual development. This is not to say that it is "easy," just more accelerated. However, an accelerated path is not necessarily a stable path, especially for a spiritual seeker who is ungrounded or easily carried away by imaginal or fantasy-like thought. It is therefore important to recognize that entheogenic spirituality does hold the potential to destabilize certain personality types if undertaken recklessly or without proper precautions and spiritual discipline. Like any powerful tool, entheogens must be used responsibly and with care in order to actually maximize their potential benefits.

Ideally, someone following entheogenic spirituality should have some kind of grounding in spiritual practice outside of entheogen use. Meditation, yoga, energy work, all of these are good for clearing the mind, centering, tapping in to the energies of consciousness and the body, and staying focused. Furthermore, such practices contribute greatly to a person's ability to stay focused and remain "on task" when working with entheogens.

How long the effects of spiritual awakening last ultimately depends on the dedication and focus of the individual. Some people only need one powerful spiritual experience with entheogens and this experience can last them for their whole life. Others might have a powerful experience but then not be transformed because they haven't focused themselves on bringing that into their life in a grounded way. It all comes down to the individual.

I don't think that there is any inherent difference between spiritual experiences that are achieved through individual effort through a spiritual practice and those achieved with the aid of entheogens. They are just different methods and use different tools.

Whether the realizations "stick" or not is up to the individual and his or her personal dedication to spiritual growth and awakening.

THE FEATHER

~ Could you talk a little bit about how you work with the feather and/or how it works with you?

In simplest terms, holding a feather in my hand is like holding an antenna or amplifier. Bigger feathers work better – especially eagle feathers. Given that we are bio-energetic beings, the feather just helps me feel that energy. God, as the One Being, is made out of energy. The energy of God permeates out in fractal patterns. As individuals, we are all personal, individual expressions of that one Divine Energy Being that is the source of our lives, consciousness, and all of physical reality. Because the energy works in fractal patterns, we are all just permutations of the one archetypal fractal pattern that is God.

As biological beings, the energy that moves through us works in electromagnetic form. From what I've received and experienced, I can explain it this way: We have five main energy centers in our bodies. These are at our genitals, our stomachs, our hearts, our throats, and our foreheads. When I work with my feather on someone, I feather them where the energy is directing me to go. It feels like magnets pushing and pulling on the feather. I don't really think about it or have to plan out what I'm doing in any way. I'm simply following the energy. It will work around people's energy centers in different ways, occasionally touching people when some energy needs to be taken out. It will also work on our main channels, which are our arms and legs, which radiate out from the central column of energy at our core.

It's important to emphasize that this is not a take on "chakras" or any other existing system of subtle physiology or energy bodies. This is what I'm getting directly from my experience of working with energy and is not something I've learned from anyone other than God.

~ Can you forsee a time when you will no longer need the feather? In other words, do you see the feather as a bridge to acting purely by intuition. Is that something you could ask the feather? Have you already asked?

When I'm in deep states of altered consciousness (without use of medicines), I can easily feel the energy. I can also do some pretty strange exercises where I can manipulate the energy with my hands and feet and no feather is needed. It's just an antenna, as I said above, ultimately, so when my perception to the energy is more open,

then the feather isn't really necessary. However, for working on others, it adds a nice touch. It's a bit more pleasant for me to waving a feather over you than for me to be waving my hands in your face.

I'd also add that I can do energy work directly on another with my hands – but that's for more hands on issues and tends to be more intense as we might have to go really deep, whereas the feather draws energies out to the surface, so it's more pleasant.

I know it will seem silly to people, but the feather is also my personal way of talking to God. I can ask questions and get all kinds of answers. Again, when I'm in deeper states of consciousness, I don't need the feather because I can directly feel the answers and I guess I would say the truth is "revealed" to me in such states. However, if I just have a quick question or am more at a surface level of consciousness, the feather provides a good medium to ask the Divine a question or two.

~ You said that the feather can suggest which entheogen would be best for which individual. Can you elaborate on how that works?

One way of thinking of the different medicines is that they open up different spectrums of infinity to the user. These different spectrums tend to work more one on energy center in a person's body than another. I've already given the example of salvia divinorum, which is a very limited infinity spectrum that tends to work on the throat center, or your center of expression (and therefore problems with ego). Next up the spectrum would be mushrooms, which have a much broader spectrum of energies than salvia. These tend to work on the heart center. Further up the spectrum is ayahuasca , which is broader than mushrooms and tends to work on the genital area (which I've interpreted as creative life-force). Even broader would be extracted DMT, which tends towards the mind/consciousness center, and the broadest is 5-MeO-DMT, which opens everything up.

In working with the feather with different individuals, I've done diagnostics of simply asking which medicine would be good for this person and what energy center or issue will it work on. So far, every person I've done a diagnostic for has felt that the advice has been right on and seems to really speak to them for where they are and what they need. The "trick" to this is that given that we are all unique expressions of the one Divine Energy Being, when I ask the feather to do a diagnostic on a person, it is the energy of God that is flowing from that person that is directing the feather and giving the advice. You, as God, know what you need. The feather just helps us to see this in "ordinary" reality. It's quite simple, really.

THE NATURE OF REALITY

~ One of the main questions I have for you, which I'm sure others are wondering as well, is what happens when to us when we die? You said that you don't believe that

heaven and hell etc. are real, but might one still end up in a heaven or hell, however illusory?

This is a big question, but the short answer is "nothing." To understand why, we have to understand what we are and what the nature of reality is. Living beings are kind of like masks or personas that the One Divine Being wears as it evolves through spacetime, or what we like to call "conventional reality." We're basically like actors in a play or movie, but we don't know that the "us" we think is ourselves is just a character that God is acting out, for lack of a better metaphor. When your body dies, your "character" has been removed from the play or movie, but the story goes on – just not for "you." This is hard for people to accept, but once we understand who and what we truly are, it becomes obvious that any kind of soul or spirit or immortal self is completely unnecessary for God to make its reality movie with us as the actors. Why would God create souls for its actors? Why would God want to then babysit these confused souls in some kind of afterlife for all eternity? It really doesn't make any sense whatsoever. God is living through you right now, this very moment. In fact, this moment is all there really is. When you no longer have a body, your character is no longer participating in God's unfolding moment of now in reality, so you're gone. It's rather liberating, really. That means we can just trash all the religious garbage that tries to get us to conform ourselves to some ridiculous notions of what it means to be saved or damned or to be a sinner or be liberated. The real goal is simply to be ourselves, right here, right now. God has created a character for you to be for the duration of your life – no more, no less. So be that character will all you've got. This is the only chance you get, so do it now, and stop worrying about what people tell you about the afterlife and what's coming next. Step into *being now*.

~ Related question: What about karma and reincarnation? On your view, is there a soul or life essence that leaves the body and which may at some point take on another body? If not, how would you account for the evidence that seems to suggest otherwise (from researchers like Ian Stevenson)?

I've always been open to the idea of reincarnation, but never convinced. Now that I know who I am and who and what the Divine Being is, I'd have to say that entire idea of reincarnation and karma is just as much a product of the ego as is the idea of the immortal soul, sin, and everlasting life. They are all just ways that the ego tries to make itself more important than it really is. In a way, these are all just ways of humans saying "it's all about us and what happens to us!" From God's perspective, this is just silly. It's like characters in a movie saying that reality is there just for them. No, it's the story that's important. The characters are just place-holders.

So no, I no longer hold open the possibility of reincarnation. It is completely unnecessary and is a mental construct of the ego. That also means that the idea of karma is completely false as well, for karma, in traditional Indian thought is that the karma in this life will affect your karma in your next life (as opposed to Westerners who mistakenly think that karma brings you good luck later in the day when you tip the guy

at the coffee shop). But if there's no reincarnation, which I don't think there is, then karma is totally irrelevant and a fabricated concept.

As for the evidence, I'm familiar with Ian Stevenson's work and have found it quite compelling. However, my answer to the question is that God is immediately present in all beings, lives actively through us, and is omniscient. We all have the capacity to tap into our personal interface with God, and therefore, in principle, any of us could be omniscient (at least in limited capacity) or have access to otherwise "unknown" knowledge. Given that we're all characters for God to enjoy acting through, what would prevent God from creating some characters who seem to have knowledge from a past life? The reason for that is less clear, but it certainly isn't beyond the capacity of an omniscient and unlimited being to do so. My impression is that God has a sense of humor and is happy to humor people, at times. So, while the limited evidence is interesting, I don't find it to be immune from other possible explanations.

SESSIONS

~ What do you recommend I do to prepare for a session with you?

Mostly just relax and try and be open. I'd also ask anyone not to partake of any alcohol 24 hours before a session, and actually my advice is to stay away from alcohol completely. It's basically an ego intoxicant and cuts off your ability to tap into divine energy. That's why people do such terrible things on alcohol like beat their lovers, commit murders, rape, etc. It's an ugly, ugly intoxicant.

~ What might I experience in a session with you?

You can expect to feel a lot of energy moving through your body. It's always different for everyone, but people tend to go into altered states of consciousness and experience lots of divine energy. Some people's eyes roll up into their heads. They vibrate and twitch or might start shaking, etc. Most people figure out pretty quickly that the feather is interacting with them. For example, and I've seen this happen to many people, if they start to think too much, the feather might smack them on the forehead to remind them to feel into their situation.

Basically what is happening is that I, as an individual manifestation of the Divine Energy Being, interact with the manifestation that is the Divine Energy Being that is you. In that, I just follow the energy and it is up to you how far you want to let that energy go. Sessions last anywhere from 15 minutes to over an hour, but people know when they are done. A lot of energy gets moved and released in the process and some people have numerous realizations about themselves, their lives, who they are, and their relationship to the divine.

Through it all I "talk" to the person and help guide them through the experience. I don't speak out loud however. I just mouth the words. So far, everyone has heard me

without a problem, so it seems to work just fine that way.

~ What general suggestions do you have for after the session?

Aside from the general advice to relax and be yourself, it will be different for each person. Many people have a lot of questions after their session and conversations might last 2 –3 hours. In such sessions we can really get at where you are spiritually and where your ego might be blocking you from being you. We can also do a medicine diagnostic for where you might want to turn for direct, personal interfacing with the Divine.

PRACTICE AND LIFESTYLE CONSIDERATIONS

~ Do you have any general recommendations as far as a daily practice is concerned?

Just be true to yourself and who you are. Express yourself. Open. Connect. Let go of fear. Center yourself in love. Don't get caught in ego-generated illusions and fantasies. Let go of trying to fit into what any religion or system tells you is a good person, or a saved person, or an enlightened person. They're all just constructs. The best possible thing you could do is strive to be yourself. Of course, we are so thoroughly surrounded by ego-generated illusions, this is about the most difficult thing you could ever possibly do, but it is the only thing you really need to do in your life.

~ Do you recommend any kind of diet in particular? Could you speak a little bit about how you eat and how you feel food affects your consciousness?

My recommendation is to try your best to eat "natural" food as opposed to highly processed foods, but I don't have any specific diet for anyone. I find that food affects my consciousness to the extent that if I don't eat enough then I get lightheaded and grumpy. Everything affects us in one way or another, but I don't personally feel the need to conform to any special diet and have never noticed a profound impact or difference between one diet or another. I was vegetarian for a while, but that only made my ego feel better that I was somehow doing the "moral" thing that I "should" do. Trouble is, I enjoy a good cheeseburger. So, in being a vegetarian, I wasn't being true to myself. I was using my ego to try and box my true self into an ethical system created by other egos to try and get egos to behave in a certain way. I don't buy into that kind of thing anymore. I think we have a tremendous responsibility for what we do with reality and how we treat other beings, but I don't think there is anything necessarily "moral" about not eating animals. I consider many traditional Native American cultures to have the highest standards of personal conduct and respect and to them, the idea of being a

vegetarian is laughable and is a non-issue.

~ How about sleep and exercise?

Get as much as you can! Personally, I recommend expressive dancing, enjoying nature, and meditation and energy work.

~ Besides taking more plant journeys, what other ways might we prepare for our sessions with the medicines? In other words, what might we do to feel more at ease with what the medicines show us, so that we are not so freaked out. Or is there really nothing that we can do besides taking them?

Actually, there is a great deal you can do, and it all comes down to being yourself and standing strong in who you are. People are consistently and continually compromising who they really are and how they really feel to fit in, make others comfortable, and to get by in society. Honestly, this isn't helping anyone. We constantly censor ourselves in often very subtle ways, and this makes us feel bad, in one way or another. Then people turn around and start to feel like they're victims, or they need to blame someone else for their problems, or they feel disempowered and helpless. Or they turn to religion to give them all the answers and help that they need, or they latch onto secular systems of thought and behavior. Though it is difficult, stop trying to please others and just be true to yourself. You'll be happier, healthier, more well adjusted, a better citizen, and a greater asset to humanity. We don't need a world of sleepwalkers, beaten down by their egos. We need people who are awake and alive and are conscious of how the divine energy is moving through them. The only way to be that is to open up to who you truly are. That takes dedication, courage, and a great deal of work. You are probably limiting yourself in ways you can't even imagine, all to fit some system of how you think you "should" be. Just relax and be yourself. That's the only thing you need to do. So practice it every day and every moment. Be true to the energy moving through you and honor how you truly feel. Don't be afraid to make others uncomfortable. Don't be afraid to be who you truly are, no matter who you think that might offend or disappoint.

GENERAL MISCELLANEOUS

~ Given this experience, as well as your previous research and experience, which writers and thinkers would you particularly recommend? Looking back now at your own writings, how do you feel about them? Do you feel they're all basically on the right track, or are there parts that now, in light of your current experience, seem to have missed the mark?

As I mentioned before, I'm really taken with Benny Shanon's work, so I'd recommend him. As for my own writings, I'd really stand behind everything in *Mushroom Wisdom* as I meant that to be an easy to understand user's guide. It's basically good advice for working with any entheogen. *Sage Spirit* has good general advice for working with salvia and also documents my own personal explorations into sage space. I write a lot in there about "spirits" and visions of temples and magical jungles and whatnot. I guess at this point I'd make it even more explicit that I don't believe that any of that is ontologically "real" – just my own personal interface with the divine. Also, now that I've been doing all this energy work with the feather, I'd include some information about infinity spectrums as I touched on a little earlier. With *The Entheogenic Evolution* I'd stand behind basically everything I wrote in there, but the book would be totally different if I were to write it today. My transition happened just a few weeks ago, and I published that book a couple months ago at this point. I left a lot of things open in that book and didn't really speak about things such as life after death or reincarnation, as you've asked me here. I didn't have much of a view on those things when I wrote the book, but I do now. I also make a great deal about heart energy in the book, but now that I have an understanding of the 5 energy centers as has been revealed to me, I'd write about those. Really, another, and quite different, book is in order at this point.

~ Could you give us a sense of some of the criticisms you have been hearing, and what you would say in response. Has anyone said anything to you that has given you pause? Has anyone given you a critique that has in any way inspired you to modify what you've said?

This will sound pretty closed minded to some, but no, no one has given me pause. Basically, I'm articulating a rather unique perspective on reality and I'm confident in what I'm saying. It comes directly out of my experience of working with energy, and as I'm am now fond of saying, energy doesn't lie. Some people don't like that I'm dismissing ideas of astral planes or reincarnation or life after death, etc., and they feel that I'm not respecting their beliefs or even their experiences. I've been criticized for being closed minded and full of myself and my ideas. My basic response is that I'm presenting a radically consistent and coherent picture of the nature of reality that starts from a very basic proposition: God is an energetic being that permeates itself through fractal patterns. This is what I've learned directly from my entheogenic experiences. All of my other conclusions basically follow from this initial starting point and my working with the energy. So, I'm more than happy to listen to other perspectives on reality, but in order to be really taken into consideration, they would have to deal with my starting point. Otherwise, we're talking about apples and oranges or quibbling over details without getting to the fundamental theory or position beneath it. For example, let's take Buddhism. Buddha said that there is no God. Well, I fundamentally disagree because I have thoroughly explored my self and my nature and have found that the source of my being is a living energetic being that is the source of all existence. I can't

think of a better word for that than God. So, I have a fundamental disagreement with Buddhism. Buddhism also says that the whole point is to reach nirvana and free ourselves from the wheel of reincarnation. Well, I think that is fundamentally flawed. Someone might say I'm not respecting their religion because of this, but I don't see the point of "respecting" something that is flawed or erroneous. Keep in mind I'm a professor and I have to grade papers and exams all the time. Students are mistaken about what they say and write all the time. If I were grading papers based on the criteria that I not offend someone for not respecting their beliefs, I'd never be able to give students grades. You either get the answer right or you don't. You've either thought out your argument or you haven't. And when it comes to reality, something either does or does not exist. And energy doesn't lie. I don't care if you're Buddhist, Hindu, Christian or whatever. Believe whatever in the world you want. Reality is still real and if you put your hand on an electric socket, it will shock you because energy is real and it cannot lie or deceive you. Belief isn't a question here. So we can talk about respecting beliefs all we want, but that doesn't help us understand reality. I'm interested in reality. I'm not interested in beliefs.

~ I imagine that there are veteran users of entheogens out there who are wondering along the lines of, "Gee, I've been taking these things for years and while I've had life-changing experiences, Martin's experience seems at some other level. Why him?"

I've said the same thing to myself. "Why me?" The answer that came back was, "Martin, it's not about you, so get over it." It's not about me. I'm not trying to create some new religion or version of reality or belief system. I'm just sharing the truth as it has been given to me. Others can take it or leave it as they see fit. I think what I'm sharing is quite liberating, and I've only scratched the surface in answering these questions here. As I see it, God, the Divine Being, is ready for people to understand how reality actually works and it's time for us to dispel all of our illusions. Certainly if we're going to be responsible as a species, the time is now. We've done enough damage to ourselves and the earth and if we're going to collectively make it, it is time to wake up and take responsibility for ourselves and reality. For whatever reason, I've been persistent and uncompromising in my quest to understand the nature of reality and I care a great deal about this world and the people and beings in it and would like to see a global transformation of consciousness where we truly wake up and live in balance with ourselves, each other, and the earth. For whatever reason, this knowledge of how this could be possible is coming through me now and it isn't because there's anything special about me other than that I have the desire and capacity to share this.

~ On the subject of gurus, as I've been a student of India and Yoga for many years now, I'm very interested in your saying that the plant medicines are far better than any human guru in terms of what they can teach us. To take but one example, it seems that those who followed Neem Karoli Baba felt otherwise, and Ram Dass of

course is the prime example, because many of the NKB's Western devotees basically stopped taking entheogens once having come in contact with him. Any comments on this?

Gurus are pretty funny about entheogens. They talk about how they are “false awakenings” and how you “have to do it on you own.” According to whom? In my understanding, God created the medicines so we could commune with God. Anyone who would tell you different is pushing some ego-created agenda on you about how you should be or who you should be. I simply don’t buy it. And besides, if God didn’t want us to use DMT (for example), God wouldn’t have filled our bodies with it, put it on our nerve endings, or made it so readily available in nature. People who claim that it is not a path to genuine spiritual experience are trying to impose human ego-creations on God. It’s silly, when you think about it.

[Please Note: My next submission to Reality Sandwich will be on this very subject of how gurus have viewed entheogens, so stay tuned.]

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So there you have it. I hope you will understand now, you who have thoughtfully listened and considered what has been discussed here, why I find what is happening with Martin so deeply fascinating and helpful. You will note that not only has Martin's story and words answered most if not all of the questions I was dealing with in my last piece for RS, but they've also provided insight into other issues, too. For example, I have been debating for some time what to title my forthcoming book, whether to use the term "entheogens," which has seemed to me somewhat loaded, presuming as it does that the plant medicines reveal to us God or the divine; or whether I should use the more widely accepted and seemingly less controversial term "psychedelics" (as Dr. Rick Strassman does in "DMT: The Spirit Molecule"). Well, after taking Martin's transformation into consideration, as well as what I personally experienced using the medicines (which seemed to me very Divinely revealing :), I definitely tend toward using "entheogens." If I don't use it in the title of the book, it will only be because I want the book to appeal to the widest audience possible, and let's face it, "Yoga & Psychedelics" is more attention grabbing.

Of course, what I feel, and what Yoga really boils down to, is the idea that only what one deeply experiences and Knows (in the Gnostic sense) is true. So even though I feel very attracted to Martin and agree with much if not all of what he has to say about God and the nature of reality (academic debate aside), what it will come down to me is actually meeting Martin, having a session with him, and/or experiencing 5-MeO-DMT myself. I very eagerly await the time when that will all happen, and I know that it will.

I want to conclude this essay by suggesting that if this piece/interview spoke to you, then tune in to Martin's podcast

(http://entheogenic.podomatic.com/), or pick up one of his books. I would especially recommend his latest offering, "The Entheogenic Evolution," particularly as he goes into the issues we discussed above in much greater detail. I was particularly moved by what Martin shared in the book of his own experiences. With his permission, I have excerpted a small section from the introduction that I feel is particularly revealing and insightful. In the excerpt, Martin is describing and commenting on an extremely profound mystical experience he had using 5-MeO-DMT (at the Temple of Awakening Divinity). I hope you also find it helpful…

With the hit still in my lungs, I lay back on the bed inside the consecrated temple of our ceremonial space. Initially, I had closed my eyes. But as I was falling back, the hit slowly escaping from my lungs with the sweet smell of 5-MeO-DMT filling the room, my eyes popped open, unable to stay closed.

Within the space of a few heartbeats, I had completely expanded into God. Eyes open in absolute awe and wonder, the room dissolved, my ego dissolved, my entire world dissolved. Everything I had ever known or thought or felt dissolved away into absolute pure nothingness. There was nothing to see, nothing to experience, nothing to perceive. Absolutely pure nothingness. And this nothingness was pure consciousness. And it was love. Infinite love and infinite perfection. Everything was in a state of divine perfection. Nothing was out of place. Nothing was good or bad. Nothing was right or wrong. Everything was simply perfect in this pure consciousness, this pure state of being. And this state was not a thing. It was not an object of perception. It was not a concept. It was not an emotion. It was not anything that I could describe in any way. In fact, when asked later, I vaguely described it as "living starlight," but even that was not accurate, for in truth, it was nothing.

But that no-thing was everything.
It was God.
And it was my deepest nature.
I was one with God.

Not my ego self. That was thoroughly obliterated through the impossibly fast 5-MeO-DMT expansion. It was not as though I identified my personal sense of self with God. Rather, the deepest core of my being, not my ego-identity, was identical with God. As a finite being in a body with a sense of self and identity, I was an expression of God. At my core, at the very deepest level, my nature as an incarnated being was one with that pure consciousness. I was one with that infinite love, that infinite source of creative energy in which all things exist in absolute and unquestionable perfection. In those few heartbeats, this beautiful and sacred medicine had opened me up to the All. I had accepted my own divinity.

"Thank you, God!" I called out as my hands reached up towards that infinite expanse of nothingness, a few moments after the hit of psychedelic medicine flowed out of my lungs. Eyes wide open, gaping in sheer awe at the mysterium tremendum, I embraced God, and the embrace was returned.

"Thank you," I said, over and over and over again, lasting the better part of an hour as the medicine expanded me out into the farthest reaches of cosmic consciousness and then gently brought me back to myself. I was so overwhelmed that I began crying and laughing at the same time. It was, beyond any doubt, the most beautiful, profound, and total experience of my life. Nothing in my psychedelic or spiritual history could have prepared me for this divine embrace. It was so total, so complete, so beyond any sense of doubt or wonder or skepticism. It was absolutely undeniable. I could hardly believe that it was true. I could hardly believe that I was saying that word: God.

I was one with God, and God was love, and I knew that I loved God with all my heart, and that I, as a small, insignificant person with my own very small sense of self and being, was embraced by the Love of All, and that all things were in absolute perfection. All that was, was God. God was the only true reality. All else was illusion – the effluence of God's creative power, manifesting in space and time as a physical world with physical beings that felt so alone and cut off. But now I truly understood, for I experienced the truth with every aspect of my being. God was Real. God was Reality. And my nature, as a spiritual being, was One with that Absolute Reality.

Slowly, I came back from that infinite expansion into the nothingness that was everything. Like a space ship re-entering the atmosphere, I could feel the layers of my individual sense of self begin to reassert themselves. The ego and identity that had been completely obliterated in the instantaneous expansion brought on by the 5-MeO-DMT regained its foothold, and as I fell down out of that exalted state, I knew myself once more. I understood that I was "Martin," this collection of patterns and habits, judgments and beliefs, choices, attitudes, and emotions. It was the "me" I had lived with all my life. But now I knew. Now I knew with all my heart that there truly was something more, and that something was more profound, more complete, and more truly holy and sacred than anything I had ever imagined or anything I had ever conceived. I knew that in the end, we, all of us, everything that we see, hear, taste, feel and experience, is really just the One Being. It is all God. God is the only true reality. And at the same time, God is absolutely nothing. Nothing at all. Nothing to grasp. Nothing to hold on to. Nothing to behold. Nothing to name or force into the box of language and conceptuality. God is simply the "I AM," and there is nothing more that can be said. God is, and that is enough.

That was my first truly divine mystical experience and I am

generally in agreement with Oroc's claims as to the unique nature of this medicine. I've now seen enough people journey with 5-MeO-DMT to know that my experience is not necessarily typical of the experiences of others, especially now that I've learned how to truly surrender into God and let go of anything that might prevent me from being absorbed fully and completely in that state. The key is surrender. Simple, really, but I've seen it be exceedingly difficult for some. Fear takes hold. One grasps onto the disintegrating ego. Fear of death becomes overwhelming. So many struggle and resist the call to fall back into the Divine Love of God. There is so much fear.

Many people are genuinely afraid of their own hearts, and the heart is the quickest path to God. As I've come to believe, the only thing that stands in the way of each individual fully experiencing God is one's self. That's all. But that can be a huge obstacle, especially if one is afraid of the contents of his or her heart, for one cannot get to God without passing through the heart. The Heart of the Universe is One, and only one who has confronted the darkness, the fear, the pain, the wounds, and the attachment in one's own heart can truly dissolve into God.

(The Entheogenic Evolution, pp. 16-18; see there for more)

Books by Martin

Ball, Martin W., Ph.D. *The Entheogenic Evolution: Psychedelics, Consciousness, and Awakening the Human Spirit*. **Kyandara Publishing, 2008.**

_____. *Mushroom Wisdom: How Shamans Cultivate Spiritual Consciousness*. **Ronin Publishing, 2006.**

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